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Laos.

I carried out your instructions with Gromyko this morning.

2. Gromyko said Kuznetsov had already told him of our conversation last night but he had no reliable information from Laos other than Agency reports. His first reactions to your suggestions were:

(a) The International Control Commission who unlike the two co-Chairmen were on the spot had not yet reported. We should await their report.

(b) The Boun Oum - Nosavan clique had consistently taken provocative line relying upon United States backing. Position of United Kingdom was less clear but he was coming to conclusion it was not "making for" a Laotian solution on basis of the formation of a Coalition Government in a neutral and independent Laos.

3. Gromyko continued that in conversation United States and United Kingdom were profuse in assurances that they were striving for such a settlement but these assurances only seemed to last as long as the conversations after which we all returned to previous situation. This had been Soviet experience of talks with Mr. Rusk in Geneva (I had impression that this remark was intended in a wider context than Laos). Boun Oum and Nosavan continued their military and political provocations and made ridiculous demands which were not rebuffed as they should be. Just because they had suffered a setback "in a certain locality", we complained. Neither we nor the Americans came to Gromyko over the many instances of military provocation of Phoumi's; hardly a day passed without one. The Pathet Lao had to repulse such sallies; otherwise he would become even more arrogant. All such incidents could best be stopped by hastening a solution of the Laos question. But the United States would not help, although it was obvious they could, and Gromyko was compelled to think the United Kingdom did not want to help either.

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4. I strongly contested Gromyko's criticism of our position and reminded him of the background to recent incidents i.e. the tacit understanding to leave a little time for pressure to bring the Laotians together to work, the recent more encouraging signs of a better understanding between Souvanna Phouma and Phoumi, Mr. Macdonald's private visit to Laos of which we had informed the Soviet Government and even our recent desire to invite Kong Lae to London. All these could be rendered worse than useless if military action now spread. Gromyko had spoken of provocative actions by Phoumi. If these were serious we should expect him to bring them to our attention. Nam Tha was a serious matter. Tass from Peking had described

it as an important stronghold. Gromyko himself had admitted he did not know the real position and the facts were certainly in dispute. Surely therefore it was the duty of the co-Chairmen to ask for an early investigation and report from the Commission. Could he not agree to this?

5. Gromyko repeated that the International Control Commission was on the spot and it was up to them to report. The crux of the matter remained however to relieve ourselves of the burden of the Laotian problem by translating into reality the statements we had all made at Geneva and elsewhere and completing the Laotian settlement. Unless the United States (and the United Kingdom) really worked for this, the impression would grow that a game was being played and that there was no real desire for a solution, once any particular round of conversations had been completed.

6. I tried again to persuade Gromyko to agree to some approach to the International Control Commission. Perhaps, I suggested, our representatives in Laos, who had often worked well together in the past, could take the necessary action. The International Control Commission might be in Laos, but they were not to my knowledge present near Nam Tha. Gromyko did not respond and answered yes when I finally asked him whether I was to tell you that he did not agree that any special approach should be made to the (grp undec) by the co-Chairmen. He urged that we should on the contrary work for an early Laotian settlement and that the United Kingdom should use all its influence with the United States to this end. I replied that we already knew this was the desire of the United States, but the Pathet Lao action at Nam Tha must hinder rather than promote early agreement. We hoped the Soviet Union would use all their influence with their friends. Gromyko said this was unnecessary, as all their friends wanted a settlement on the lines agreed at Geneva.

7. Gromyko's manner was throughout more genial than his replies might suggest. I concentrated more on the International Control Commission than on restoring the military position to the status quo ante, because of the very conflicting reports from Laos and Paris as to what really happened around Nam Tha and because of the implied order of priorities in Vientiane.

8. United States Ambassador is seeing Gromyko this afternoon.

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